

is particularly true of Alvarado's book reviews (1984a, 1985) and his discussion of language-barrier problems in parapsychology (1989a). Moreover, Alvarado, a former research assistant at the Division of Parapsychology (now the Division of Personality Studies) at the University of Virginia, has maintained a constant flow of information on parapsychological activities in Latin America to research centers in the United States for the last eight years. In addition, among the Ibero-American parapsychologists, he is the one who has published most extensively in the English-language journals and the only one ever to be elected a member of the Board of Directors of the Parapsychological Association.

### Mexico

Mexico has been known for a long time as the land of the sacred mushroom or peyotl, a plant used by the Indian shaman to induce an altered state of consciousness, which allegedly facilitates the manifestation of psychic powers. This country has also been a major source for many parapsychological researchers interested in unorthodox psychic healing practices. Famous curanderas (healers) such as María Sabina and Doña Pachita have been extensively investigated by Stanley Krippner and other famous parapsychologists (Krippner & Villoldo, 1986).

Although Mexico has been a major source of study for many parapsychologists from foreign countries, psychical research has not flourished there as it has in other countries such as Argentina and Spain. Moreover, even though the country is located on the southern border of the United States and has been subject to very strong American cultural influence in almost every aspect of life, the dominance of the United States has not been a factor in the development of parapsychology. Even though in the United States there are more parapsychological research centers than anywhere else in the world, very little is known in Mexico of their research. Most of what is known about serious parapsychology comes from Latin American countries such as Brazil. For example, the writings of Quevedo are well known in Mexico, and also most of what is known generally comes from popular magazines.

Early efforts to study psychical research within a scientific framework in Mexico began in 1919 with the isolated efforts of such researchers as the German-born medical doctor Gustav Pagenstecher, the first researcher to conduct serious psychical research in Mexico. Pagenstecher was a very well-known and respected physician in the

Mexican medical community as well as in political circles. In the course of his career he delivered speeches before two presidents of Mexico, Díaz and Obregón (Allison, 1943).<sup>11</sup>

A respected member of the medical profession, Pagenstecher said he had been a materialist for forty years when he had his first encounter with the paranormal. It was during a hypnosis treatment of one of his patients who had insomnia that he discovered the remarkable psychical gifts of María Reyes de Zierold. Pagenstecher began a series of psychometric experiments with her in 1919. The results were so striking that he brought them to the attention of the Mexican medical society, which appointed a commission to verify them. Pagenstecher also decided to write to the ASPR and send some of the results he had obtained. The results induced Walter Franklin Prince, Research Officer of the ASPR, to go to Mexico to investigate the case. After a series of experimental sittings with Zierold, Prince was so impressed with the results that he decided to publish them in the *Journal of the ASPR* in 1920 (Pagenstecher, 1920). Prince later published another paper in which he discussed the experiments in which he participated (Prince, 1921b). Moreover, the ASPR published a monograph by Pagenstecher entitled *Past Events Seership: A Study of Psychometry* (Pagenstecher, 1922).

According to William Roll (1967), Pagenstecher contributed to two major areas in parapsychology:

[He was], as far as I know the first investigator to use hypnosis as a means to cultivate ESP in a gifted subject. . . . Pagenstecher's studies were also, I believe, the first to indicate that the (parapsychological) association of objects may be governed by the same laws that govern the (psychological) association of ideas. (p. 238)

Pagenstecher showed great courage in undertaking these experiments. He jeopardized his professional standing as well as his medical practice by trying to substantiate the claims for Zierold's psychic abilities. The Medical Commission appointed to investigate the case was skeptical of the reported phenomena. Fortunately, however, the Commission's leading experts obtained successful results in the experiments in which they participated (Gomezharper de Treviño, 1990).

<sup>11</sup> Obregón was a revolutionary military leader, later President of Mexico. Walter Franklin Prince (1921a) relates an interesting psychic experience witnessed by Obregón, about a precognitive dream Obregón's brother had about the death of their mother.

Another development in parapsychological activities in Mexico occurred in 1937. A team of medical doctors, headed by Dr. Enrique Aragón, formed a special commission to investigate an alleged case of poltergeist activity surrounding a thirteen-year-old Mexican boy named Joaquín Velázquez Villavicencio. As part of the investigation, the team tried to measure the level of RSPK energy, using a special apparatus called a sthenometer designed by the French psychological researcher Paul Joire to detect PK forces (Gomezharper de Treviño, 1990). Aragón's contributions were important to parapsychology in Mexico because of his prestigious position and his academic attainments. Aragón was at one time president of the University of Mexico and was also founder and Director of the Instituto de Psiquiatría y Psicología there. He conducted field research on haunting cases, precognitive dreams, and fraud in Spiritism.

In 1939, Aragón founded the *Círculo de Investigaciones Metafísicas de México*.<sup>12</sup> The aim of the Institute was to conduct a scientific investigation of a case of alleged materialization produced by the most famous medium in the history of Mexico, Luis Martínez. The medium started his activity when he was six years old and allegedly could produce incredible phenomena, such as lights, reports, direct writing, direct voices, levitations of objects, and so forth. The attention drawn by the case led to the participation of medical and political men in the sessions. Two ex-presidents of Mexico were said to have participated in the séances (Garofano, 1988). Other work worth mentioning is that conducted by the Jesuit priest and psychological researcher Carlos María Heredia. He recorded several observations and experiments in which odors (or other stimuli) associated with forgotten experiences were presented to the subject, theoretically causing an imbalance in the subject's subconscious memories associated with the odor which, in turn, induced a telepathic transmission of the forgotten experience to a nearby perceptive (Heredia, 1931/1945).

For Heredia, telepathy and spontaneous case occurrences were fairly acceptable; however, phenomena of the séance room were to him anathema. Having developed some skills as an illusionist, he used to tour the country demonstrating mediumistic manifestations,

<sup>12</sup> This research group later changed its name to Instituto Mexicano de Investigaciones Siquicas, which also published a detailed account of the séances with the medium Luis Martínez which lasted for over ten years. The publication was called *Una Ventana al Mundo Invisible* [A Window to an Invisible World] (Instituto Mexicano de Investigaciones Siquicas, 1960). Another interesting dimension of this case is the participation in the séances of two well-known Mexican psychological researchers, Gustav Pagenstecher and Carlos María Heredia.

as he supposed, by his methods of nonspiritual conjuring. He wrote a book along these lines debunking the mediumistic phenomena claimed by Spiritists; it was called *Los Fraudes Espiritistas y los Fenómenos Metapsíquicos* (1931/1945). Unfortunately these efforts to organize serious centers and societies to study psychic phenomena from a more empirical approach never led to a more formal type of organization; most of these centers and investigations were short-lived.

Since the 1930s, very little is known of any other serious efforts to introduce scientific parapsychology to Mexico. After 1940, as I mentioned at the beginning of this section of the paper, the best known studies have been conducted by anthropologists and parapsychologists interested in nonorthodox practices of healing, particularly those of the shamanistic variety.

Among the healers was the famous Oaxacan shaman, Bárbara Guerrero, best known as "Pachita," who practiced as a psychic or seer and who in the 1960s became the subject of enormous attention. Pachita was studied by Krippner and Villoldo (1986) and others. Another healer, perhaps the best known of all, was María Sabina, who drew worldwide attention because of her use of hallucinogenic mushrooms in her unusual healing practices.

It was not until 1974 that the first Mexican parapsychological society was created, the Sociedad Mexicana de Parapsicología, headed by Carlos Treviño, a psychiatrist and an Associate Member of the Parapsychological Association. The Society at the present time represents the most critical approach to parapsychology in Mexico. It trains researchers and provides education both to the Church and to lay persons concerning alleged cases of demonic possession and other manifestations of psychic phenomena. The Society also offers courses in parapsychology to the general public in an attempt to correct misconceptions about the nature of scientific parapsychology. For example, in Mexico the common belief is that parapsychology is a mixture of magic, demonology, and sorcery. A parapsychologist is thought to be a person who reads Tarot cards and coffee grounds and prepares horoscopes. Under these circumstances an average Mexican tends to dismiss such beliefs, particularly since they are deeply rooted in their tradition and cultural heritage (Gomezharper de Treviño, 1990).

Along with courses for the general public, the Mexican Society is the only organization that offers an officially required course for candidates to the priesthood studying at the Instituto de la Arquidiócesis de México. Members of the Society have also conducted ex-

perimental research with Kirilian photography (Treviño, 1975) and field investigations of haunting cases and poltergeists.

Some parapsychological conferences have been organized in Mexico—for instance, the Congreso Internacional de Parapsicología held in 1984 in Mexico City. The Society also organized the Primer Simposio de Parapsicología Científica held in 1984. At this meeting a number of PA members presented papers, among them Marilyn Schlitz and Stanley Krippner (Gomezharper de Treviño, 1990).

Another conference worth noting is the one organized by the newly created Sociedad Mexicana para la Investigación Escéptica. The first Latin American skeptics' conference was cosponsored by SCSICOP and convened in Mexico City in 1989. The conference included speakers such as Ray Hyman and James Alcock, as well as several psychologists from the University of Mexico. The new Mexican society of skeptics headed by Mario Méndez has launched a journal called *El Investigador Escéptico*, which will be made available throughout Latin America for Spanish-speaking readers.

An example of the attention to parapsychology given by high-ranking political figures in Mexico was the visit of the wife of the former president of Mexico, Carmen López Portillo, who visited the Institute for Parapsychology in North Carolina to participate in some testing demonstrations of ESP. It is also interesting to note that the president's sister, Margarita López Portillo, prepared a video about the life of the famous Mexican healer "Pachita." There are also some isolated researchers in Mexico such as Jacobo Grinberg who in 1977 conducted research in dermo-optic perception.

It is unfortunate that one can find no serious parapsychological publications in Mexico at the present time. There are only some popular magazines on the topic, such as *Duda* [Doubt].<sup>13</sup>

### Conclusion

So far, I have surveyed the past and present positions of parapsychology in several Ibero-American countries. But what does this conglomeration of names, societies, and research centers mean? First of all, as I have pointed out, my purpose was to familiarize the English-speaking parapsychologists with the work of their colleagues from other countries, especially those researchers who have been in

<sup>13</sup> *Duda* is a magazine that is widely published nationally. It includes sensational articles on mixed topics such as UFOs, ESP phenomena, cryptozoology, and so on.

the field of parapsychology for many years but whose work and publications have been neglected in the major English-language journals. Second, I have reviewed a variety of parapsychological activities so as to provide the reader with insight into the different approaches to psychical research in different countries as well as into the cultural, geographical, and historical factors that have colored parapsychology in those countries. Some of the information provided is new and, may I say, very interesting. The different research methodologies pursued by the parapsychologists in these countries range from the empirical quantitative approach of the Argentinean group, who follow the Rhinean School, to the theoretical and Spiritualistic approach shaped by the influence of ideological and cultural constructs of the Brazilian Spiritists and Catholic researchers. However, in a way, these different approaches to the study of psychic phenomena are reflections of the cultural milieu in which the research has evolved.

Another important feature that emerges from an examination of the developments of parapsychology in these countries is that most Ibero-American researchers are in the main plagued with the same practical and theoretical problems common to most other countries involved in psychical research. Common problems are the struggle to gain recognition in their own scientific communities and the lack of economic means to support research.

Still another unfortunate pattern is the isolation of individual researchers in these Ibero-American countries from their counterparts in the English-speaking parapsychological community. Some of these researchers, such as J. Ricardo Musso and Naum Kreiman from Argentina, have been doing research and publishing extensively since the 1950s but remain virtually unknown outside their own countries. Very few of the researchers from those countries have ever belonged to the Parapsychological Association. A brief review of the most recent list reveals that even at the present time there are very few Ibero-American members in the PA, an organization that claims to be international.<sup>14</sup>

It is my hope that this brief summary will bridge the gap created by the language barrier and will remedy the previous lack of information, thus fostering communication between Ibero-American researchers and their English-speaking colleagues. The increase of communication with parapsychologists in the Ibero-American

<sup>14</sup> Ibero-American members account at the present time for less than 8% of the Parapsychological Association members (Parapsychological Association, 1991).